

Dear Family Member,

Welcome to our next unit of study, “Transcontinental Railroad.”

We are kicking off our seventh unit in the Benchmark Advance program. As with the previous units, I am providing suggested activities you and your child can do together at home to build on the work we’re doing in class.

In our seventh unit, we will read and compare selections about the construction and impact of the transcontinental railroad to understand how communities evolve. We will be reading a variety of genres, including informational texts, a firsthand account, a diary entry, and even song lyrics!

This unit will allow you and your child to discuss the history of the United States while examining how a country can change over time.

As always, should you have any questions about our reading program or about your child’s progress, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Transcontinental Railroad

In this unit, we read about the construction of the transcontinental railroad, which connected the east and west coast of the United States. As we read, we will think about the question “How do communities evolve?” Here are some activities you can do at home to continue the conversation we started at school about evolving communities. Think about your own community and how it has evolved and changed over time.

Topic Connection

Interviews About the Past

Students are reading texts about how communities changed as a result of building the transcontinental railroad. Work with your child to find a senior citizen in your community who would like to be interviewed about what your community was like when he or she was a child. After conducting the interview, speak with your child about the way the community has evolved, and the pros and cons of that development.

Vocabulary Connection

Crossword Crazes

In school, your child is learning new words related to the development of railroads in the United States, and their impact. To help your child learn the meaning of some of these words, put together a simple crossword puzzle for your child using these words: **tycoon, obstacles, resources, roamed, and impact**. If you'd like, make another crossword puzzle that uses some of the other words from the unit: **process, embattled, developed, baron, grueling, and unite**.

Comprehension Connection

Pony Express to Video Chat

In this unit, students read about the Pony Express riders who worked to deliver messages on horseback during the 1800s. Work with your child to make a time line that tracks the way sending messages has evolved in America since the Pony Express. Include innovations such as the mail system, telegraph, telephone, email, texts, and video chat. Research the dates that each of these innovations was popularized so that you can correctly track the evolution of communication in American communities.

Word Study Connections

Community Progress

As students study how communities evolve, focus on the word *impact*. Ask your child to draw a poster of how changes in the community may impact the people who live there. He or she may include a caption or labels to point out the specifics of the impact being depicted. Discuss the ways you think your community could change and who those changes might affect most.